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SUBJECT: HIGH MEDIA AUTHORITY SUSPENDS PRO-KABILA NEWSPAPER

REF: KINSHASA 1505

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11. (U) Summary: The High Media Authority suspended the pro-Kabila daily "L'Avenir" for impugning political adversaries. The HAM also reduced sanctions against those accused of inflammatory rhetoric during the official launching of the pro-Bemba political alliance. End summary.

12. (U) The High Media Authority (HAM) suspended the daily newspaper "L'Avenir" October 4 for a five-day period for accusing Jose Makila Sumanda, Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works and official of Jean-Pierre Bemba's Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), of embezzling 60 million Congolese francs (USD 120,000) earmarked for salaries to fund Bemba's campaign. The HAM also reprimanded the publisher of "L'Avenir" for defamation. The minister rejected the allegations of embezzlement, noting that 80 million francs (USD 160,000), in fact, had gone missing from the ministry.

13. (U) In another decision, the HAM reduced the media ban, from 30 to 15 days, it had placed on a few journalists and politicians who had made abusive and inflammatory statements at the launching on September 23 of Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba's Union for the Nation (UN) political alliance (reftel).

14. (SBU) Comment: "L'Avenir" is very much the mouthpiece of pro-Kabila hardliners, and the measure taken against it by the HAM is further evidence of its independence and seriousness of purpose. End comment.

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